

## Middle Eastern Leaders and their Biographers

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Can the writing of modern Middle Eastern history continue to do without biographies of men who have led others? That historians have so far dispensed with biography is not at issue, for the paucity of biographical writing by historians of the Middle East is openly acknowledged by the historians themselves. In a comprehensive survey of Middle Eastern historiography<sup>7</sup> written a decade ago, the historian Albert Hourani pronounced that "there are almost no satisfactory biographies, even in the modern period." Yet in the course of that essay -- the closest thing historians of the Middle East have to a Langer-like discourse on their "next assignment" -- the author did not prescribe biography of any sort. If asked today what they considered to be the first order of priority in the historiography of the modern Middle East, many historians would still answer as Hourani did: social history. His prediction-cum-prescription that "social history seems likely to be the dominant mode of history writing for the present generation" has<sup>1</sup> largely come to pass. Social history was a priority first established by the Orientalist Sir Hamilton Gibb, who had written a similar essay of admonition two decades earlier. "It is vital to stress the word 'society'," he wrote, "for, notwithstanding

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the external impact of the Western powers upon the Middle East, it still remains true that the nature and pressures of the internal social forces engaged have largely determined the working of its political structures."<sup>2</sup>

It was here, in the reconstruction of past societies, that the historiography of the Middle East bore the least resemblance to work done by historians of Europe and America. I well recall an informal talk once delivered by social historian Lawrence Stone to a group of historians of the Middle East at Princeton, based upon his work on the history of childhood. After a brief discussion of Middle Eastern parallels, Stone said it seemed that historians of the Middle East had only the haziest notion of what was going on in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century family, the bedrock of society. The observation was not intended as a slight, but as an expression of sympathy for less fortunate historians thwarted by the poverty of their sources. But impressions like Stone's, reiterated in contacts with colleagues in the more populated branches of modern history, made historians of the Middle East believe themselves to be Clio's stepchildren -- a sense which pervades Hourani's essay. In their pursuit of recognition as equals, many turned their efforts (or those of their students) to social and economic history.

It is difficult to say whether historians of the Middle East noticed William L. Langer's very different "next assignment",<sup>3</sup> made in 1958, two years after Gibb made his. Totalitarianism had driven historians of Europe and the Soviet Union to reconsider the role ~~in history~~ of individual personality. For

Langer, that reconsideration proved decisive, and with his appeal for the use of psychoanalytic insight by historians, he provoked a controversy that has not abated. As it happened, Langer's earlier diplomatic history of European alignments occupied a prominent place in the bibliography of the Eastern Question, a subject studied at one time or another by all historians of the modern Middle East. But Langer's essay prompted no exchange among them. The leaders of the Middle East did not inspire the kind of theoretical <sup>introspection</sup> soul-searching that Hitler and Stalin did; ambitious policies of world peace, world revolution, and world war had not been theirs to make. Lord Bullock once wrote that there remained a gap between cause and the magnitude of effect in the career of Hitler that defied his own capacity for explanation.<sup>4</sup> Historians of the modern Middle East, in measuring cause against effect in the <sup>careers</sup> ~~actions~~ of Middle Eastern leaders, have not felt all that unequal to the task. *Sense of inside game has alienated them from the field.*

*And so* But few historians of the modern Middle East have deemed the preparation of full biographies to be their professional task. None has expressly objected to the enterprise of biography. Nowhere does one encounter a Spencerian denigration of the genre ("And if you wish to understand these phenomena of social evolution, you will not do it though you should read yourself blind over the biographies of all the great rulers on record,<sup>5</sup> down to Frederick the Greedy and Napoleon the Treacherous"). The apparent aversion to biography among historians of the Middle East must rest nonetheless upon an implicit <sup>assumption</sup> logic which poses the question of whether biography of leaders is at all necessary to the larger enterprise, or to "total history." The objections to

biography, were they made explicit, might take this form:

Leaders assume and maintain authority only so long as personal need coincides with societal need. Societal need is generated by structured society, under the impact of world economic forces, the uneven diffusion of technological change, shifts in the distribution of coercive power, patterns of migration, climate -- in sum, those impersonal forces which are the mainsprings of history. These may favor continuity or change. The historian's first task is to reconstruct societal need through social <sup>and economic</sup> history, to understand the structure and function of society and the impact of long-term forces upon both. Only then can the historian interpret the event of leadership in relation to the structure of society. If societal need is born of acute distress, and generates social movements, leadership may take a charismatic form; but charisma is a perception among those who are led, not a personality trait of the individual leader. <sup>6</sup> *The evidence*  
*for charisma resides only in the collective.*  
~~It is largely situational; it may wax or wane.~~ Nasser, in his Philosophy of the Revolution, suggested that Egypt herself ~~had~~ created the role which he ultimately filled, a role which ~~had~~ sought him out. The historian's first obligation is to explain why societies perpetuate old roles and create new ones, particularly the role of the charismatic leader, which is symptomatic of society in distress.

In order to achieve and hold authority in a political community, the leader must not only fill the designated role, but must have an accurate perception of the limits set by that

community and by the forces extraneous to it. In the case of the Middle East, those limits are narrower as a consequence of dependence. The leader's power is deflated, his society rests upon a narrow base of those resources -- social, economic, military -- which can support change. Biography, especially political biography, is a medium which tends to underestimate societal needs and constraints, a tendency all the more distorting in the Middle Eastern setting, where the possibilities for leader-driven change are limited.

Once the historian moves from society to politics, his first<sup>7</sup> task is to set out the range of possibilities open to the political community, a range defined by internal and external political constraints. The leader, as well as his rivals, must compete somewhere within these limits, or court certain failure. The study of a leader's emotional development, personality, and early and private lives -- the distinguishing marks of psychobiography -- adds only marginally to an understanding of his public career. Some information on social origins, career path, and ideological formation (all relevant influences) will help to set the leader squarely in a social and political context. But in analyzing The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III, Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali, Egypt under Nasser or Iraq under Qassem, the historian has no need of full biography. His leader will have achieved power by personifying the aspirations of a political community or a coercive elite generated by a political community. He will have been a political man, motivated by the pursuit of power and self-interest, both personal and collective. By necessity, he will

have conducted this pursuit rationally, in a conscious effort to gain and maintain power. By an analysis of societal need, internal and external political constraints, and the leader's conscious perception of his and his followers' self-interest, the historian should be able to explain the leader's conduct with a persuasive rationality, through the use of social and political source materials. Indeed, much of a leader's conduct will be overdetermined, attributable to several causes without resort to biographical evidence that is not explicitly social or political.

A problem may arise should this ~~social and political~~ analysis fail to explain <sup>to the historian's satisfaction</sup> certain of a leader's actions which seem <sup>on the face of it</sup> irrational. Such actions are more likely to occur later in a career. The leader may trespass the boundaries set by his own political community or by an extraneous force. In doing so, he may pursue an apparently self-destructive or aimlessly destructive policy. In some instances, such conduct is caused by defective signaling -- that process by which leaders are alerted to situations which require diagnosis and response. "The concealment of meaningful circumstances from leaders is a very old story -- as old as the <sup>we know the</sup> tale of the caliph who would roam the streets of Baghdad incognito at night to learn things about the lives of his subjects that his ministers withheld from him." Leaders do often act on unreliable information, and sometimes act on less information than the later historian has at his disposal. In instances of defective signaling, the leader acts without an accurate perception of <sup>the</sup> reality, but not without conscious rationale. It is the task of the historian to reconstruct the

origins of what was essentially a collective misperception.

There remain those instances of <sup>irrationality</sup> irrational behavior which cannot be explained except by reference to the leader's own impaired perception of reality. Here it may be necessary to call in the doctors; their specialty will depend on whether the source of impairment is physiological or psychological. But there is no legitimate cause to summon history's physician-biographers until all else has failed. In the rare instance that the leader becomes certifiable, a cautious essay into the unconscious finally becomes essential, but only to an exploration of <sup>otherwise inexplicable</sup> irrational decisions made by the subject during a troubled period. Only at this point can the details amassed in full biography, especially about early and personal life, <sup>well</sup> be accommodated in the comprehensive pattern of causation by which the historian seeks to explain change in societies and political communities.

These objections to biography in its predominant forms -- political and psychological -- constitute the theoretical manifesto of no one historian in particular. And yet they are assumptions which underlie both the aversion to biography of many historians of the Middle East, and the way individual action is interpreted in many political, social, and intellectual histories. In these works, the dramatis personae appear with cursory introductions, usually in the form of biographical profiles of a few paragraphs or a few pages. This is all that is really necessary for the purpose of placing the individual's actions and ideas in the wider context of the study. Single chapters may



even bear the names of individuals as titles, but these discussions are devoted to an elucidation of the acts or texts which constitute the public career and record.

This approach had proven so unsatisfactory for the history of ideas that some historians of the Middle East overcame their aversion to full biography, in order to ground disembodied ideas in context. Again, Hourani would have preferred that these ideas be set in a social context; he regretted not having done so himself in his Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age. In practice, several historians have found it more useful to relate ideas directly to individual circumstances through biography. These biographies have been full studies not of leaders, but of thinkers; not of those who held authority, but those who coveted it. The task briefly brought some of the ablest historians of the Middle East to the biographical endeavor. The most thorough of these efforts was the systematic reconstruction, by several hands, of the life of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who has formed the subject of two full-length biographies and enough shorter studies to warrant a small book of bibliography. Other full biographies have been devoted to Mirza Malkum Khan, Jurji Zaydan, James Sanua, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, Shakib Arslan, Sati al-Husri, and others. Historians of the Middle East thus generated a corpus of biographical writing devoted to persons who often influenced governments and dominated intellectual circles. But these figures never commanded the allegiances of social movements and never organized successfully to seize power; they were what Tucker has defined as "nonconstituted leaders."<sup>8</sup> Most



of those who did attain power -- leaders of political communities -- have yet to emerge from the broad political and social histories, where they act and react according to the conscious dictates of personal and collective self-interest -- political man's universal motives.

The claim of biography upon the historian must ultimately rest upon a view of the individual leader as one whose actions are not solely determined by expectations of the collectivity -- this, despite the fact that social and political circumstances will have established the initial role which the leader must fill. If the political community is suffering under foreign occupation, his first role must be that of the liberator. If it is torn by internal strife, his must be that of the statesman. If it has yet to find an identity, his must be that of the ideologue. If it is seeking a return to <sup>a lost authority</sup> ~~the traditions~~ of religion, his must be that of the inspired saint.

<sup>205</sup> In the period during which the leader establishes his authority, he must meet societal need more effectively than any of his rivals, or expect a challenge. It is here that biography seems to promise no more than an account written in the form of a political and social history of the collectivity. In either case, the leader will never be lost from sight for long; but, like the leader himself, the historian and biographer cannot afford for a moment to lose touch with <sup>the "people"</sup> ~~the needs of society~~, the mood in the marketplace, the expectations of supporters, the activities of rivals, ~~the probability of foreign threat~~, and the international situation. While establishing his authority, the

leader and the role become inseparable. His time is spent almost wholly in the public arena -- in public gatherings, in political and military planning sessions, perhaps on the battlefield. He perceives reality clearly, his decisions are underpinned by a compelling logic. He makes few mistakes. <sup>Shake</sup> His power to persuade others grows, and he seeks <sup>may</sup> to have it institutionalized, through election, appointment, or revolution. ('routinized')

Both a history and a biography must give an account of the collectivity's elevation of a leader. And ~~in this phase of the leader's march, a biographical account that seeks to explain his ascent by emphasizing idiosyncrasies of personality is~~ <sup>bound to</sup> ~~mislead.~~ This occurs occasionally in psychoanalytic biography, where the Oedipal jinn is invoked to explain that which is already overdetermined by rationally-adduced causes. ~~The usual way~~ psychoanalytic biographers deal with the <sup>drive</sup> prime motive of the rising Middle Eastern leader is ~~to explore~~ the relationship between the leader as a child, and his parents. Nasser lost his mother when he was just over eight years old. His father remarried within the year. One report has it that Nasser resented his father's remarriage, and there is substantial testimony that his relations with his father were never more than distant. Sent off to school in Cairo, Nasser spent his adolescence in the charge of his paternal uncle. As Sadat later wrote, "Gamal nursed many painful personal disappointments which he remembered since his mother died when he was very young. Her death greatly affected his life." But how? Sadat simply says it made him shy. But with this evidence, Wolfenstein (who has

studied "revolutionary personalities") has suggested that Nasser blamed his father for his mother's death (explaining Nasser's later ambivalence toward paternal figures like Naguib), and that he identified with the lost or dead mother during a long period of disorientation. Egypt became for Nasser the mother, to be resurrected and saved, a displacement which first found political expression through an Eriksonian crisis of adolescence in the riots and demonstrations of the 1930s.<sup>10</sup> But Nasser's experience was not unique. After Atatürk's father died, his mother remarried, sending the adolescent into a rage. According to Volkan and Itzkowitz, Atatürk's "undying, unconscious, selfish childhood wish was to rescue his mother, to be her savior. It was a selfish wish because underneath it represented his desire to have a repaired mother who would be able to be a more nurturing mother to him. That wish to be the repairer of his mother became the altruistic wish to save his country; the two goals were linked in his unconscious mind."<sup>11</sup>

One will find precisely the same explanation adduced in Loewenberg's psychoanalytical essay on Herzl, who was "almost exclusively raised by his mother . . . the boy worshipped his mother and sought her counsel; the man remained very close to her until the end of his life." Indeed, Herzl's mother outlived him by seven years. In Loewenberg's view, Herzl took up the Zionist cause out of an ambivalence toward his mother, (for which there is evidence in the Zionist leader's creative writings ("where women consistently drive their menfolk to destruction"). In this analysis, the "ambivalent feelings toward the oral mother of early infancy" are decisive:

Together with the receptive position there is oral aggression: there are violent fantasies of devouring a grudging mother, of attacking her breast. The derivatives of such infantile fantasies are dreams of forcibly extracting wealth from the soil, of cutting great canals, rebuilding cities, and transforming the land. Such aggressive and destructive fantasies give rise to strong guilt feelings and the need to make reparation to rebuild fantasy damage. By seeking to return to the mother land, to preserve and restore it, to make it "flow with milk and honey," Herzl is repairing fantasy damage to his infantile mother. These are also rescue fantasies. He will rescue those in a degraded moral and political position. What in infancy and childhood was perceived as the degraded mother is in adulthood redeemed as people and land. He will return mother to Zion and all her children will come to live there in happiness. He is making restitution in his unconscious by re-creating the promised land, making it rich as a productive, fertile haven of peace. The motherland will be cared for and cultivated, will be made to bloom and to bear fruit.<sup>12</sup>

Why is it that the historian can make no practical use of this analysis, whether or not he accepts its controversial theoretical assumptions? Quite simply, it can be invoked in regard to every leader, and is therefore useless in any attempt to discriminate among them. The rescue and reparation fantasies are ubiquitous: they fill Nasser's mourning and guilt in Cairo over the lost nurturing of a mother, and Herzl's oral aggression and guilt in Vienna towards a mother who never left his side, nurturing him to excess. The equation of mother and country has been invoked in psychoanalytic biographies of Dayan and Hitler in precisely the same manner. All it can purport to tell us is that these men had strong desires -- as strong as a man's love for his mother -- to defend or redeem their countries. This the historian does not need to be told. Erikson has put it diplomatically: "A passion for defending the purity of mothers against vile intruders, foreign and domestic, may have been an

emotional prerequisite for many future liberators (from Bolívar to Hitler). But the time and the place, the power, and the method of the liberatorship demand an acute sense for actualities and, above all, a simultaneous mobilization of the leader's emotional resources and those of the led."<sup>13</sup>

For that phase of the leader's ascent during which he "acquires" power, it is difficult to write biography in a way that is substantially different from the account one might find in a standard political or social history of the affected period, place, or group. The leader is fulfilling social expectations and gaining authority in the process. He is acting with a consummate rationality, even when he appeals to the irrational in his following. He may continue to do so throughout his public career, always answering to the <sup>voice of the people</sup> vox populi -- in which case the historian might spend his time more profitably in charting the course of public sentiment. Here Hook's distinction between the eventful and the event-making man, problematic though it is, does help to distinguish between those for whom biography is essential, and those for whom it is not.<sup>14</sup> Sa'd Zaghlul, the hero of the Egyptian wafd party, was a genuinely populist leader whose eventful career is the subject of a rare scholarly biography in Arabic. Like all Egyptian nationalist leaders, Zaghlul owed his "liberatorship" to the popular mood of resentment against foreign domination. But the Wafd was never in a position to fundamentally alter the imbalance which perpetuated that domination, and Zaghlul always acted within the narrow confines of a role defined by the situation, by his following,

and by the British. Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brethren, and Lebanese Shi'ite leader Musa al-Sadr, similarly led populist movements which arose out of collective distress, but in their inability to alleviate that distress, they could never advance beyond the most rudimentary political roles of agitators. They were charismatic leaders for their circle of followers, but they never exercised charismatic authority.<sup>15</sup>

But a leader, having fulfilled a profound social need born of acute distress, may ultimately be vested with charismatic authority by a political community. He may have brought salvation in war or revolution; he may have restored a sense of identity to a people in despair. His authority was conceived in the crucible, and he now dares to test the old social and political constraints. He is no longer satisfied with playing a role established by society; he seeks to create and define a new role. So it is that great leaders are born out of great crises: for they can exercise what might be called political licence.

It is precisely at this point that the individual leader can bring about constructive or destructive changes which owe themselves principally, if not solely, to his will. He now commands all the assets of the political community -- military, economic, technological -- which have been bestowed upon him in trust. The political community grows passive; why should it hold that man accountable who, more than any other living man, personifies its aspirations? [His rivals are in disarray,] and he may now act freely to crush them if he so chooses. The leader then begins to test the constraints imposed by his own society!

and political culture, and perhaps even those imposed by the wider world on his political community as a whole. It is here that the leader's personality begins to matter, and to matter a great deal, if the means placed at his disposal are sufficient to restructure the world of his followers -- or the world.

As it happens, Middle Eastern political communities have not been able to muster the wherewithal necessary to redress the imbalance of power between themselves and the West, or to alter the balance of contending forces within the West. In modern times, few Middle Eastern polities have even possessed the means to alter the political structures of other Middle Eastern polities. But there have been a handful of Middle Eastern leaders, exercising the political licence of charismatic liberators, who have succeeded in altering the structures of their own polities and, in even rarer instances, their societies. And it has been in such tasks of domestic restructuring that the Middle Eastern leader's personal vision and will have come into full play. Atatürk, Reza Shah, Ibn Saud, and Nasser not only ruled, but institutionalized their authority in forms which expressed not the collectivity's needs, but their own. Only a great social revolution could undo the state apparatus created by Reza Shah, and even then, only in part; the forms of government created by the others remain intact.

These particular forms were not always demanded by the movements which carried these leaders to power. Atatürk, while playing the role of national liberator, conformed wholly to the expectations of a distressed political community faced with the threat of foreign occupation. Few members of that community



could yet conceive of submitting to anything but the traditional authority of the sultan-caliph. Atatürk, at one with his role, championed the cause of the sultan-caliph; indeed, he waged his war of liberation with the declared aim of freeing the sultan-caliph from the grip of foreigners who occupied the Ottoman capital. These wanted to deprive the sultan of his temporal authority, and maintain him in Istanbul as a strictly spiritual caliph. This was Atatürk's response in 1920: "The first goal of our struggle is to show our enemies, who intend to separate the sultanate from the caliphate, that the national will shall not permit it." Yet four years later, once success in war had raised his standing as national liberator above challenge, Atatürk himself ordered precisely this measure, separating sultanate from caliphate and abolishing the former. Two years later he had the caliphate abolished altogether, thus establishing the primacy of the republican institutions of government which survive in Turkey as an anomaly in the Middle East. Yet had Atatürk personally elected to rule as sultan, he could have done so, just as Reza Khan became Reza Shah. The Turkish struggle for independence embodied the will of many; the Turkish republic, the will of one.

Simultaneously, Ibn Saud led his following of desert Ikhwan in a campaign of conquest to unite Arabia, a war undertaken by the Ikhwan with the purpose of purifying Islam and redeeming Muslims from the corrupting influences of unbelievers. Ibn Saud personified the collective needs of the Ikhwan, embodied their fervor and intolerance, and commanded their total allegiance. Yet once they had recognized him as king, Ibn Saud progressively

opened Arabia to the wider world, and then crushed a rebellion of the Ikhwan who believed that he had betrayed their trust. By force of will, Ibn Saud established Saudi Arabia not as a self-isolated theocracy, but as a modernizing monarchy.

Such reversals may alter not only forms of government but policies of war and peace. Sadat had inherited some of Nasser's charisma by designation, but he labored under the burden of a collective morale crippled by the effects of war and foreign occupation. In 1973 he filled the idealized role of the liberator created by that distress -- and with his augmented personal authority, undertook a peace initiative that only a war hero could have pursued to success. Atatürk, Ibn Saud, and Sadat demonstrated an adaptability and resourcefulness bordering on opportunism in pursuit of authority, and rigid personal will once they had achieved it. All three leaders gradually and selectively broke societal constraints once respected by them, even championed by them. In the role of liberators, they met the expectations of political communities in crisis; but in doing so, they acquired sufficient personal authority to demand that others conform to their own expectations, their personal visions.

To inquire after personal visions is to ask questions which only biography can aspire to answer. A leader may never possess sufficient authority to pursue his vision; he may spend a lifetime pursuing power or trying to hold on to what little he has. To again employ Hook's distinction, these leaders have had eventful careers, but they themselves are not event-making; they are best situated not in biographies but in accounts of the events themselves. But when a leader senses that the political

community has given him its absolute trust, he himself may begin to substitute his personal vision for that acute insight which made for his ascent. It is here that personality may become decisive, and the historian cannot but give an account of it. For once the leader has begun to act upon the dictates of fantasy, and is allowed to do so with a free hand, the historian cannot explain, cannot adduce cause, without reconstructing the more intimate processes of the mind. The historian of course has been reconstructing motive all along, but this has been transparent motive, formed within the narrow confines of social expectations. But once freed from those constraints, the leader may begin to answer needs generated solely from within. External reality becomes clouded. "For me nothing is impossible," Reza Shah declared; he once told those accompanying him on an inspection tour that "there is no problem so great that my will power cannot deal with it; to me this great mountain ahead of us looks like a smooth plain."<sup>16</sup> For Sadat, a protracted conflict between peoples over the tangible asset of land became "90% psychological" -- its resolution could be achieved by the exercise of sheer will. Herzl wondered to his diary whether he had indeed succumbed to megalomania, but persisted: "If I point with my finger at a spot: Here shall be a city, then a city shall rise there." There is no more powerful expression of what Loewenberg has called Herzl's abandonment of reality than the conviction inscribed on the frontispiece of his Altneuland: "If you will it, it is no fantasy."<sup>17</sup>

Historians are rarely comfortable interpreting the fantasies

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that break to the surface in the self-expression of leaders. And , they need not interpret them so long as fantasies remain confined to a distant realm by the leader's own sensitive reading of the dynamic reality which surrounds him. At his most ambitious (and perhaps even this is too much), the historian seeks to reenact motive. He need not retrieve every thought -- every fantasy -- that crossed his subject's mind, any more than he need reenact the experience of every soldier to explain the outcome of a battle. But leaders who have freed themselves, by whatever means, from the constraints of accountability, may begin to act on fantasy, to pit their will against the now-diminished force of reality. This is the self-grandiosity of narcissism. When it is tempered and transformed in the mind of the leader by exigency, he appears to the historian as a visionary, capable of effecting constructive change; when it is unbridled, he appears as a psychopath, whose expressed fantasies, symptomatic of megalomania and paranoia, are likely to culminate in aggression. In either case, the collectivity, still spellbound, is indulgent and obedient; the leader now makes events, both creative and destructive, and he makes them alone.

This is where the explanatory capacity of self-interest breaks down. Gay is right to remind us that "enlarg[ing] self-interest into a universal motive is to render it diagnostically useless to the historian, who, like any other analytical student of human affairs, must discriminate if he wishes to explain."<sup>18</sup> The processes of the mind which the historian seeks to reconstruct in his pursuit of motive are not of one kind. The historian's subject may have heard an inner voice more compelling

than the real and cacophonous voices that seek to influence him. The historian in rare instances will be allowed to hear that voice himself. At times in his life, the last shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza, had dreams -- even visions -- in which the great figures in the pantheon of Shi'ite Islam appeared to him, urging him to stand fast. An account of these visions is given in his first autobiography. The historian cannot but ask at which moments this inner voice overwhelmed the voices of counsellors and critics, and affected Mohammad Reza Shah's political perception and action (especially during 1979, when he was already terminally ill). The same question must be asked regarding those other leaders who are known to have experimented with mysticism. Sultan Abdulhamid II surrounded himself with mystics; Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was swayed by the ideas of dissident messianism which swept Iran in the nineteenth century; and Khomeini as a younger man enjoyed a suspect reputation in clerical circles for his ventures into mystical philosophy. I suggest these simply as points that the historian must not overlook; others have already gone further, to suggest that all three leaders exhibited signs of sub-clinical paranoia.<sup>19</sup> \_/

At times the evidence for that inner voice is indirect. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani consistently made exaggerated claims about roles he had played or was offered. Keddie writes that these claims "may have been made mainly to impress his listeners" -- that is, in conscious pursuit of utilitarian self-aggrandizement -- "but at times his exaggerations are so careless and foolhardy that they lead one to suspect that he did not

always distinguish fact and fiction." Keddie profitably reads these boasts as indirect evidence for the fantasies which consumed Arghani, and upon which he began to act, most notably in inspiring the assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah.<sup>20</sup> Malkum Khan, pioneer of Iranian modernism, made similar boasts. He claimed that he had founded a religion which numbered 30,000 adherents; that he was a foster-brother to the Shah; and that he became prime minister, so that "at the age of twenty I was practically despotic in Persia." He clothed reform in the "garb of religion," and claimed single-handed credit for having introduced the telegraph and other instruments of progress to Iran. He had "no intention at the outset of founding a religion. The character of saint and prophet was forced on me by my followers." For Malkum Khan's openly hostile biographer, what is significant about this "pseudo-autobiographical statement" is that it spins "a web of distortion, mendacity, and charlatanry," for in every detail it is misleading or untrue.<sup>21</sup> This is what Algar intends when he calls it a fantasy: Malkum Khan was deliberately attempting to dupe a credulous listener. Yet might it be a fantasy in another sense, as a myth about the self, generated to sustain what Algar disparagingly (and loosely) calls his subject's "egoism"?

Alongside these self-grandiose fantasies, the historian of the Middle East finds pervasive evidence for fantasies of conspiracy in the acts and words of individual leaders. The overtures of certain Middle Eastern leaders to Nazi Germany had an obvious foundation in their perceptions of self-interest. But there is now much evidence that those leaders who opted for

outright collaboration, especially the Palestinian Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Syrian Shakib Arslan (Reich-appointed translator of Mein Kampf into Arabic), shared the fantasy of a worldwide Judeo-Anglo-Bolshevik conspiracy. Most Middle Eastern leaders, carefully reading the balance of forces in war, sought to avoid exclusive identification with either side. Yet Hajj Amin and Shakib Arslan, absolutely convinced of the conspiracy's existence and the imperative need to defeat it, made the irrational choice of overt collaboration with the Axis. Nor did they allow themselves an initiative of reconciliation with the Allies once the war began to go badly for the Axis; Hajj Amin stayed in Berlin almost to the very end. Here again, the historian is called upon to reconstruct a process of decision decisively affected by personal impairments.

Fantasies are manifestations of deeper conflicts that can only be retrieved through full biography. This incorporates yet transcends political biography and psychobiography. It must celebrate the methods of political biography -- the careful reenactment of the interplay of conflicting interests and the cut and thrust of political maneuver, explained through the scrupulous elucidation of conscious motive. Yet the biographer must also seek to give an account of the subject's early and private lives. That account must be selective, integrated in the political account when it is relevant, secluded in a parallel track when it is not. This is not an artificial division of an integral life; it is an attempt to capture the divisions which were the essence of the life as it was lived. Reza Shah once



confided to an associate that "when work goes smoothly and progress is made, then I put on some weight, but otherwise I feel unhappy and dissatisfied. I don't enjoy music and dancing. I don't have too much to do with my wives, and I have no recreation other than attending to the nation's welfare: that is my happiness."<sup>22</sup>

Whether or not one chooses to call this displaced libido,<sup>23</sup> it makes for certain disproportions in the life of a political man which the biographer must respect. But the disproportions are not static ones; they may be altered dramatically once the inhibitions of accountability are gone, and the leader sets about implementing personal visions. Then the historian must have resort to a theory of personality.

But which theory? The historian crosses the theory-strewn battlefield of contemporary psychology in dazed astonishment. Wars of religion have been waged there. His intelligence and professional discipline are offended by the recklessness of the psychohistorians, their subordination of evidence to theory, and the intolerant cults they have erected around their prophets. The historian knows and protests that some things can never be retrieved, that he is often left holding a candle to illuminate a world. Certainly there are lives that cannot and should not be written on the basis of the meager or tendentious evidence now available (and any historian of the Middle East cognizant of recent advances in critical scholarship must now include the life of the Prophet Muhammad in the list of lives beyond retrieval). But other lives are not so remote, and new discoveries and openings of documents may suddenly illuminate them. If these sources are never used in an attempt to unravel personality,

biographical writing by historians of the Middle East will resemble the products of the indigenous Islamic biographical tradition. Muslim biographers did not have much use for causality; they knew as a matter of faith that omnipotent God, in fashioning His creations, also took the trouble to create their individual personalities (akhlag). "Thus God created him," the biographers would write when confronted with conduct that struck them as out of the ordinary. The world -- Muslim and otherwise -- has since been turned upside-down; historians assume that man himself fashioned his God (or gods), and created His attributes. To feign humility now would be disingenuous.

## NOTES

1. Albert Hourani, "The Present State of Islamic and Middle Eastern Historiography," in his Europe and the Middle East (Berkeley, 1980), 163, 191 (first published in 1976).
2. Hamilton A.R. Gibb, "Problems of Modern Middle Eastern History," in his Studies on the Civilization of Islam (eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk; Boston, 1962), 340-341 (first published in 1956).
3. William L. Langer, "The Next Assignment," American Historical Review (January 1958) 63(2): 283-304.
4. Alan Bullock, "Foreward," in Franz Jetzinger, Hitler's Youth (London, 1958).
5. Herbert Spencer, The Study of Sociology (New York, 1884), 37.
6. On whether Weber indeed regarded it as trait or perception, see Dankwart A. Rustow, "The Study of Leadership," in his Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership (New York, 1970), 15-18.
7. Robert C. Tucker, Politics as Leadership (Columbia, Missouri, 1981), 32.
8. Ibid., 71-75.
9. For one summary of the argument over role and personality, see Saul Friedländer, History and Psychoanalysis: An Inquiry into the Possibilities and Limits of Psychohistory (New York, 1978), 62-64.
10. E. Victor Wolfenstein, Center for International Studies Paper, Princeton University, October 1965; the paper was not published, but its arguments are summarized by P.J. Vatikiotis,

Nasser and His Generation (New York, 1978), 317-319.

11. Vamik D. Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, The Immortal Atatürk: A Psychobiography (Chicago, 1984), 126.

12. Peter Loewenberg, "Theodor Herzl: Nationalism and Politics," in his Decoding the Past: The Psychohistorical Approach (Berkeley, 1985), 131-132.

13. Erik H. Erikson, Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence (New York, 1969), 224.

14. Sidney Hook, The Hero in History (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1943), 151-170.

15. This distinction is explained by Ann Ruth Willner, The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership (New Haven, 1984), 15-17; the author also attempts an analysis of Mohammad Reza Shah's and Khomeini's invocation of historical myth (pp. 78-88).

16. Donald N. Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi: The Resurrection and Reconstruction of Iran (Hicksville, N.Y., 1978), 230; this account is strictly narrative.

17. Loewenberg, "Theodor Herzl," 129-130.

18. Peter Gay, Freud for Historians (New York, 1985), 107.

19. Alma Wittlin, Abdul Hamid: The Shadow of God (London, 1940), 155-156, 201-214 (this biography, vitiated by many defects, represented the first "psychological study" of any Middle Eastern leader); Bruce Mazlish, "The Hidden Khomeini," New York, December 24, 1979; and note 20 below.

20. Nikki R. Keddie, "Sayyid Jamal ad-Din 'al-Afghani': A Case or Posthumous Charisma?" in Rustow, Philosophers and Kings, 170. In this essay, Keddie allows herself "a psycho-historical analysis of Jamal ad-Din," drawing upon theoretical literature on

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